

ACTION 26119

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February 25, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR:

GENERAL HAIG

FROM:

JON HOWE

SUBJECT:

Sihanoukville Route

In the attached memorandum John Holdridge reiterates several of Director Helms' reservations about distribution of unclassified information concerning Sihanoukville. The points raised are good ones although Director Helms may also be haunted by the embarrassment to CIA and the Administration that might result if the full story on earlier estimates is revealed. I offer the following additional comments but have no strong feelings one way or the other on this issue:

-- By indicating that we learned about the importance of Sihanoukville, after the fact, at least in terms of a detailed appreciation, we not only imply an intelligence failure but that the President made his decision without a full understanding of the importance of Cambodia as an enemy source of supply. At present the record is cloudy. To be useful to the President, this information should imply that he had reason to believe Sihanoukville was extremely significant and this was later verified during the operations. At the same time, this can not be over done since the story of the intelligence failure is well known within the bureaucracy now.

-- On the other hand, if we indicate that we understood the significance of Sihanoukville then it could be argued that a primary reason for the Cambodian operation was to prop up Lon Nol and thus insure that the enemy would not regain access to this port and its logistics routes.

-- Comparisons between the results of the Cambodian operations and what was shipped through Sihanoukville beginning in 1966 could produce some sniping, as Mr. Helms points out. However, it should be noted that equipment transported over the Sihanoukville route was consumed by the enemy in battles, captured by US search and destroy operations throughout South Vietnam, destroyed by interdiction and some of it undoubtedly remains in caches in both South Vietnam and Cambodia. The comparisons CIA used

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to assess our progress during the Cambodian operation were based on estimates of what the enemy would choose to maintain in Cambodian strategic stockpiles, ie. 9-15 months of certain materials based on estimated needs, rather than on estimates of what was coming down the Trail or through Sihanoukville.

-- We have been lucky thus far on the issue of complicity of certain high Cambodian officials. While it can be partially laid to Sihanouk, the involvement of others is obvious.

On balance I tend to favor a selective use of this information rather than a Klein blitz, but with slight modifications to the text, I do not believe it would be a disaster if it is decided to go ahead. We may be overly sensitive on this issue.

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